

# Preserving Local Government Records

## Getting Started with Historical Records Trust Funds



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# Overview of the Local Government Records Program

The Local Government Records Program of the State Archives & Public Records Administration oversees records management functions for all municipal, quasi- public and local agencies. This includes records management advice, assistance, and consultation.

This guide is intended to serve as a resource for use by the municipal clerk or municipal archives.

## Things to Know

**What does the law say about the Historical Records Trust (HRT)?**

### **§ 42-8.1-20. Rhode Island Historical Records Trust established.**

- (a) There is hereby established a special fund to be known as the Rhode Island Historical Records Trust (hereinafter called Trust).
- (b) There is hereby imposed an additional assessment of four dollars (\$4.00) for every instrument filed for recording pursuant to §§ 33-22-21 and 34-13-7.
- (d) All monies retained by a local government shall be placed in a Historical Record Trust Fund maintained by the local government. The expenditure of these monies shall be restricted solely to the preservation of public records of historical value maintained by the municipal clerk or by a municipal archives.

View the full section: [R.I. Gen. Laws 42-8.1-20](#)

### **What is Records Management?**

Records management is a comprehensive task encompassing all records, regardless of format or media.

### **What is a Permanent Record?**

Those records that are appraised as having continuing value. Traditionally the term has been used to describe records no longer required for current use which have been selected for permanent preservation. (Keeping Archives p. 463 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 1993)

### **What is Preservation?**

The actions which enable the materials in a municipal archives or records vault to be retained for as long as they are needed, i.e. the basic function of storing, protecting and maintaining records and archives in archival custody (*Keeping Archives*, p. 476)

## Getting Started

### Preservation Projects

Expenditure of HRT funds is limited to the preservation of *permanent* records in the custody of the municipal clerk or municipal archives. Eligible, recommended projects include:

- Environmental improvements for records storage areas such as HVAC upgrades, water detection alarms, fire detection systems and dehumidifiers;
- Ultraviolet (UV) filters for existing florescent bulbs or replacement LED lighting in records storage and research areas;
- Preservation supplies for the rehousing of permanent records;



**Recommended:** Acid- free folders, plastic clips and appropriately sized archival grade boxes are important rehousing supplies.

- Metal shelving (powder-coated) for the efficient use of vertical space;
- Temperature and humidity monitoring devices for storage areas;
- Microfilm backups of permanent records;
- Producing digital surrogates of fragile or damaged permanent records to be made available for the public, thereby limiting physical access to the original;
- Conservation treatment for unique individual items;
- Emergency remediation for damaged permanent or historical records;
- Disaster planning for protecting municipal records;
- Preservation assessments of the collection or its records; and
- Intern projects encompassing the flattening, foldering and rehousing of records.



**Note:** Trust fund monies are not intended for use of those activities, projects or workflows which are traditionally funded through a municipal budget appropriation, but for those records that require preservation, specialty care and housing among other considerations.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some commonly asked questions about the administration of the Historical Records Trust Fund Act:

- **Can the local Historical Records Trust Fund be in an interest-bearing account?**  
Yes.
- **Is the assessment collected on RI Housing filings (previously Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (RIHMF)?**  
No, because these instruments do not require a filing fee. The assessment attaches only to those documents listed in R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 34-13-7 and 33-22-21 for which a filing fee is collected.
- **What about land evidence filings not covered under R.I. Gen. Laws § 34-13-7, such as tax certificates and municipal tax liens, on which fees are collected?**  
Recording fees on tax certificates and municipal tax liens are set out under Title 44. The assessment in the Historical Records Trust Fund act attaches only to those filing fees listed in R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 34-13-7 and for probate under 33-22-21.
- **Does the assessment apply to Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) filings?**  
No. UCC filings fall under Title 6A.
- **Does the assessment apply to supplying copies of instruments or for the certification of probate documents the cost of which is provided for under R.I. Gen. Laws § 33-22-21 (6)(c)?**  
No. The Historical Records Trust Fund act states the assessment is imposed for every instrument filed for recording pursuant to section R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 34-13-7 and 33-22-21. Copies and certifications are not filings.
- **Does the assessment apply to certificates of appointment for which a fee is listed under R.I. Gen. Laws § 33-22-21 (6)?**  
No, because the document is not a filed instrument.

## Helpful Resources

- R.I. Gen. Law - Historical Records Trust Fund Act
  - [R.I. Gen. Law 42-8.1-20](#)
- Approved Records Retention Schedules
  - [Department of State Records Management Page](#)
- Conservation Resources
  - NEDCC [Choosing and Working with a Conservator](#)
  - Cultural Heritage - [Hiring a Conservation Professional](#)
- Northeast Document Conservation Center
  - Preservation [Assessments](#)
- Disaster-Planning Tool for cultural and Civic Institutions
  - [dPlan-RI Online](#)
- Department of State Records Management Resources
  - [Records Management Webpage](#)